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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews some of the issues in the new literacy studies and the questions, from an anthropological perspective, of self, person, and identity that affect literacy practices. It is suggested that in discussing literacy, it is better to start from a cultural viewpoint rather than an educational one. The traditional autonomous model of literacy is critiqued, particularly the "we" of western cultures giving literacy to "them" in the developing world. The complexity of the relationship between literacy and culture is also addressed. The notion of personhood in different cultures is further discussed, and some ethnographic examples are reported. Implications for education and pedagogy are considered. Contains approximately 70 references. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education) (LB)

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[1]Literacy in Cross-Cultural pespective: Implications for policy and practice

(Keynote Address to ACAL National Conference, Sydney, 1992)

B.Street (Sussex)

I want to do three things -One is just to run over fairly quickly some of the conceptual apparatus that is becoming familiar in the New Literacy Studies, to extend it and to deal with some of the problems it has raised in various ways; then I want to focus specifically on questions of self, person and identity, using some anthropological literature, and to consider what the implications of that are, for how we look at literacy practices. And finally what are the implications for pedagogy of approaching literacy and the construction of personhood in this way. Approaching the themes of the conference at which this paper was first given: in this way might, I will suggest, lead us to adress not *The Rhetoric, The* Romance, *The* Reality of Literacy, but rather to ask *Whose*Rehtoric, *Whose* Romance, *Whose* Reality?

I start with the argument that I constantly find myself putting as an anthropologist, that when we discuss literacy, it helps not to start from education. I think it's important to put education back in at some point, but in order to comprehend what's going on it seems to me important to start from a different perspective. We often find ourselves as anthropologists looking at literacy practices in different cultures and you start with a question of epistimology: in what ways is knowledge constructed in this particular community, or questions of identity, self, person, which appear at first sight not to have a great deal to do with literacy, and that seems to me an important benchmark, if you like, for thinking about literacy - what directions are we coming from to it, rather than starting with it at the centre.

Firstly, then, some of the theories and concepts. I have tried to develop a distinction between an autonomous and ideological model of literacy and I will discuss here briefly one or two of the issues that that have been raised since it was first put forward. The argument goes that a great deal of the thinking about literacy in a previous generation has assumed that literacy with a big "L" and a single "y" was a single autonomous thing that had consequences. In the area that I know particularly well, Development the autonomous model of literacy has been a dominant feature of development theory, in relation to education and social progress generally. The underlying assumption of modernization in the post-war era, has been that if some societies appear to be less advanced than others; the way to get them advanced was to give them the things the so-called advanced ones had. Whilst that appeared to be true in the economic sense, the notion was carried over also to education and to literacy. So if "we" in the west had literacy, we should be able to give "them" in the developing world, the literacy that we had, and they would then catch up. I put that very crudely, but actually if you look at a lot of the agency literacy around the world in development, that was the organizing frame. Some of these ideas around the autonomous characteristics of literacy, I would argue, persist across the development spectrum wherever modernisation theory hasn't been challenged;.and they persist in educational worlds. One form the argument has taken is in terms of what has been called the great divide so I will briefly summarise that particular debate.

The argument went that the shift in society from oral to written, the shift in individuals from oral to written, the shift in history from oral to written, was the grand shift of history, and all the other things that had gone on at different levels weren't so significant as this. This shift from oral to written - had consequences for cognition, for mental processing of various kinds,

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for the kinds of social organizations, for democracy, development - the thing spins off, and you find those assumptions - the great divide - built into huge amounts both of development literature and of educational literature. This view, presents itself as "common sense". And that's what I now want to come on to. One of the reasons for referring to this position as an autonomous model of literacy is precisely because it represents itself as though it isn't a position located ideologically at all, as though it is just natural. And one of the reasons why I want to call the counter-position ideological is precisely in order to signal that we're not simply talking here about technical features of the written process or the oral process. We're talking about people's own notions of the writing process itself; we're talking about the fact that people in society not only practise reading and writing but they have models and ideas about it and that there are contests over them.

People often ask why don't you just call this a cultural model of literacy up against the autonomous model? There are all kinds of problems I think with simply signalling it as cultural. The reason I want to stick with ideological despite the fact that the word ideological is a difficult one is because I think it signals very precisely that there are always contests over the meaning and the use of literacy pracices. And that those contests are always embedded in power relations of some kind. And that seems to me an important starting point from which we then go out and begin to research in a variety of contexts.

The agenda, then, is contested already. There is variation in literacy across a whole range of different practices, contexts, domains andin each case there are competing discourses" - a useful phrase, I think, for handling this used by Lee (1992) in a recent book produced by Longman. These are power relations we're talking about. So that's why I want to stick with the notion of an ideological model. I will add one further gloss on that which is that people have said "we don't like these dichotomies - you've just set up a new one here, ideological and autonomous." I'd like to argue that this isn't in fact a dichotomy; it seems to me quite clear that the autonomous model of literacy is already ideological. What characterises it as a particular kind of ideology is the way in which it disguises its ideological status. Its claims of neutrality are what make it precisely an ideological model. And one of the ways in which ideology works is precisely by disguising its features.

Terry Eagleton (1990) trying to deal with various uses of the word "ideology" offers some helpful distinctions. We have moved beyond the notion that ideology refers to Stalinist top-down mind control but , he points out, there is still a problem which he debates with Thompson and various other people about whether an ideology is always that of a ruling class. Eagleton says if that's the case how do we then deal with questions such as feminist ideology - do we say that isn't ideology, in contexts where quite clearly the people who are putting it forward aren't in a dominant position. So he wants wants to be able to use ideology both for representing control but also for contests over meaning, contests over resources, and that seems to me a slightly better place to locate the issue of literacy. Literacy practices are in fact always contests over meaning, over discourse (cf Gee, 1990), over resources. They may be represented in the autonomous form as a dominant ideology; and you only have to read the media about Government language policy, National Curriculum etc. to see the way in which the technicist language claiming neutrality about literacy practices still dominates a lot of the popular exhortation. Like Eagleton, I do want to be able to use the word also for resistance for those forms of literacy practice, for those conceptions of literacy which resist the dominant one. So, in a sense, both ideological and autonomous are in fact ideological - the distinction disolves.

I will cite briefly some of the concepts that are being worked around in the field and that we need, I think, to elaborate in order to examine literacy more closely from within an ideological model. Firstly, the concept of "Literacy events" was coined by Shirley Brice Heath (1982a) on analogy with speech event, in the socio-linguistic literature. A literacy event,, then, is any

event in which reading and/or writing has a role.If you're trying to do research on literacy, you can't research "literacy" - you've got to find something to actually look at and this is what the concept of a "literacy event" facilitates. This is not true only for research; it also applies to curriculum development, development programs, management of literacy. programs in the South, and such-like. The same issue is there. What is it we're actually looking at? Heath's notion of literacy events is quite helpful in saying here is some concrete practice you can actually look at. Lectures represent a classic literacy event: The lecturer reads the odd note here and there; an overhead slide projects different types of notes; occasionally people take a note down; some of them might file it away somewhere in a bureaucracy; some of them might throw it in the waste-paper basket, an important part of any filing system, as word processing packages have taken on board; the audience might look up at the overhead, and look down and write, read their own notes and listen again at the speaker. The whole is, in a sense, greater that the sum of its parts.and is underpinned by systems of ideas and organisation that are not necessarily made explicit in the immediate discourse.

But I'm not entirely satisfied with the notion of a literacy event because event seems to signal mainly behaviour. And we know as anthropologists that what gives meaning to all the scribbling and the notes and suchlike are that we all have models in our mind of what this behaviour means; in fact we've all been socialised into the particular conventions of the literacy event in which we are involved quite strongly, and we'd soon notice if someone was doing it wrong - if someone started interrupting at the wrong moment, or whatever. There are all kinds of conventions which people internalise - we all know in everyday literacy events such as encounters with bureaucracy, or in seminars or meetings how tightly controlled the conventions are. They are often more apparent at times of political resistances - feminist and other movements, for instance, tend to resist dominant speech/writing conventions, to make them explicit and then find ways of changing and resisting them.

What I am arguing then is that we have models in our minds of the literacy event, which need also to be signalled and these models are culturally constructed not natural. I want to use the concept of literacy practices to indicate this level of the cultural uses and meanings of reading and writing. Literacy practices I would take as referring not only to the event itself but to the conceptions of the reading and writing process that people hold when they're engaged in the event. The distinction has been well summarised and further elaborated in a recent book called Writing in the Community (Sage, 1991). So armed with those two concepts, literacy events and literacy practices, within the framework of an ideological model, it seems to me possible to go out and start doing comparative research as well as to organise programmes and develop curricular in a more socially-conscious and explicit way.

However, I have to put one brief warning in relation to the uses of the concept of "culture" in elation to accounts of literacy practices. The phrase "culture is a verb "is something I used last year at a conference of the British Association of Applied Linguists (Street, 1993) to signal the way in which within my discipline and I think in others - we have come to recognise the dangers of reifying the concept of culture , just as people have reified the concept of literacy. Culture began to become a single thing with a big "C." For instance in some consultancies we've been involved in I remember doctors asking "could we have lists of the characteristics of different ethnic minorities which we can put up on the sugery door - somatic views of illness, for instance - put it all down on a list and here's another culture here's another list. Culture becomes an inventory. The theoretical position I think of a lot of contemporary anthropology is that culture is a process not an inventory of characteristics for differentiating one set of people from another (cf. Thornton, 1988). It is very hard anymore to use culture in the nominalised way that it has been used. We're talking about cultural processes. We're talking about the ways in which in fact people themselves are aware of cultural processes, the ways in which ideas, symbols, signs, cultural artefacts can be used and changed. A telling example I encountered recently in South Africa was around the use

of the concept of a "cultural weapon" by Zulus. I was talking to a civil rights lawyer there recently who was quite clear that the government were playing on a notion of culture in its reified sense: the appeal to tradition as though it were a fixed thing handed down from the past and to be revered by the present is in fact something that is constructed at the present moment in time. And that insight in a sense is what's true in any account of culture. Its account of itself will represent itself as having a great tradition, a depth, and a history, whereas in fact it's being used at the present moment for particular purposes. So it's a process and it's continuing.

So what I want to avoid, in looking at the cultural aspect of literacy, is recreating the reified list - here's a culture, here's its literacy; here's another culture, here's its literacy. And that unfortunately is one of the problems we've got ourselves into with the notion of multiple literacies. It seems to me the notion of multiple literacies is crucial in challenging the autonomous model. We have to be able to indicate that the notion of a single literacy with a big "L" and a single "Y" is only one subculture's view and there are varieties of literacy practices. But once you slip into the notion of multiple literacies you then begin to move towards the listed inventory.- I will indicate just a few of the different ways in which the notion of multiple literacy has been defined recently to indicate the coneptual as well as ideological difficulties entailed.

The work by Kirsch and Jungblatt in America (1986), "Profiles of America's Young Adults", for instance, talks of three literacies: reading, writing and numeracy with possibly a fourth, document processing. In Australia there's a certain amount of work going on regarding frameworks and competency scales for assessing literacy levels (Griffin, 1990) And one set of those says explicity there are four literacies: literacy for knowledge, literacy for self-expression, literacy for practical purposes, literacy for public debate. Heath (1983a), working in the Piedmont Carolinas, talked about three communities, each having a literacy. In a sense, the work I was doing in Iran (Street, 1984), talking about three different literacies - maktab literacy, school literacy, commercial literacy - could take on that same characteristic if we assume that each literacy is associated with a different community. That's certainly the case of some work in America around adolescent literacies in and out of school; Miriam Camitta (1993) for instance, talks about vernacular literacy and schools literacy, where the vernacular literacy represents a resistance to the dominant mode by adolescents who develop their own literacy practices separately. Barton and Ivanic (1991) in the book, Writing Community talk about "domains" of literacy, and community literacy has become quite a key concept in the Lancaster research programme.

I have tried develop the notion of dominant literacies, on the analogy with some of the work in socio-linguistics around the notion of dominant language (Grillo, 1989), where the argument is that if you talk about "standard," it looks as though that's naturally the one that we should all be acquiring. If you talk about dominant language, you're asking the question how did it become dominant, how does it reproduce itself, how does it contest with other marginalized languages? And I want to use the analogy to talk about dominant literacies as opposed to marginalized literacies. And finally Harvey Graff, recently pulled together many of the different metaphors and extensions of literacy that he'd come across, - computer literacy, poitical literacy etc.. The most interesting one he'd come across was the notion of emotional literacy. The metaphor only works if the referent is taken to be not the social practices of reading and writing but rather the concept of literacy as high skill, achievement, the ability to accomplish those tasks that make the nation "civilised".

There are a whole range of other literacies of that kind. There seem to me, then, a number of problems in the concept of multiple literacy. The number of different ways in which the notion of "literacies" in the plural is being used creates a lack of precision, a vagueness which allows the word to be used for anything to do with communication, thereby losing the

precision and force of the notion that literacy refers to the "social practioces of reading and writing". Also, if we're not careful we slide back into the reification that correlates a given community, with a given literacy. A single culture with a big "C" becomes associated with a single literacy with a big "L." So I take a comment from Neil Mercer of the OU who suggested recently that the notion of literacy practices was more "robust" than the notion of multiple literacies. As a researcher, I can see the point of that. If I go out looking for a particular literacy I think I've set up a problem already. If I go out looking for literacy practices, and see how they contest with other literacy practices in relation to contested cultural processes, it seems to me I'm on slightly safer ground.

So that's some of the ground that a number of researchers have been over in the last few years. A great deal of current research in ethnography of literacy practices is beginning to explore the associations between cultural conventions, literacy practices, notions of self, person and identity and struggles over power . We need, then, not just "cultural" models of literacy but "ideological" ones, in the sense that in all of these cases, the uses and meanings of literacy entail struggles over particular identities up against other identities, often imposed ones.

Personood

There is an anthropological literature on the notion of "personhood" in different cultures that can be helpful in this context. Kirkpatrick , for instance, suggests that "personhood is best viewed as a field that is ideologically structured in any society." (1983, p. 1). By this he means, not that the person is determined by dominant or top-down institutions (as in earlier concepts of "ideology", cf. Eagleton, 1990), but that it is "a site of articulation of dominant and subordinate ideological components". There is a struggle over the appropriate definitions of the person, rather than a single, "totalizing concept such as the individual" with which many western societies (and theorists) operate. Kirkpatrick provides a helpful summary of different ways in which the person has been represented in both academic literature and popular ideology. The person has been viewed, by Mauss for instance, "as a basic term organising morality and a fundamental category of the human mind"; by Hallowell as an important means for the cultural formulation and production of self-awareness; and by Geertz as a model of and for action, central to an understanding of both social order and social process" (Kirkpatrick, 1983, p. 1). Geertz, for instance, according to Kirkpatrick, makes evident "the multifunctionality of the person". Different cultural understandings are called upon in different contexts regarding the nature and potentialities of the person. In many western societies, the person is linked with the idea of a single, persistent and whole "individual as though this persona operated across all contexts. "The western concept of the person as a bounded, unique more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgement and action organised into a distinctiove whole and set contrastively both against such whole and against a social and natural background is ... a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures." (Geertz, 1984, p. 126 "From the Native Point of View: on the Nature of Anthroplogical Understanding" in Schweder and LeVine).

In contrast, other societies, such as those in Polynesia, where Kirkpatrick worked, make more evident the varied meanings of personhood in different contexts. The cross-cultural data, then, suggest that the "notion of the person held in society is inevitably complex and ambiguous" and different facets of the person are called upon for different purposes and contexts. Despite this variation, however, in a given social milieu "the person constructs retain a core of values and meaning for social participants". In particular, the judgements of people and events as "moral" is frequently focussed upon notions of personhood: what is proper

behaviour, what is human/ not human; how "we" and "they" are classified in some universal world order; all of these ordering procedures make central use of the concept of person.

Without entering too deeply into the complex debates over terminology, regarding the self, person, subject, agent, persona, individual, identity etc., I will borrow a few definitions from an anthropological collection The Category of the person, (ed. M. Carrithers, CUP, 1985) that have been found helpful in that disicpline. Carrithers in describing "An alternative social history of the self" refers to two stories or subject matters: 1) that of the "personne", the person/ individual as a member of a significant and ordered collectivity (kinship or the state, for instance, detrmine the person as a clan member or as a citizen); and 2) what Mauss refers to as "Moi", the self, the conception of the physical and mental individuality of human beings within a natural or spiritual cosmos and interacting with each other as moral agents (the Christian notion of the soul or the Freudian conception of a psychophysical complex). Jean la Fontaine further distinguishes between the term 'individual' which she uses to refer to the "mortal human being, the object of observation and 'person'" which refers to concepts that "lend the object social significance" (p. 126). Anthroplogists focus on both similarities and differences. Dumont, for instance, contrasts the western notion of the "individual" as a unified whole, with that of the socially-centered person in India. Fontaine describes a number of African societies where, although the western individual is not a major organising idea, nevertheless there is a concept of person which serves to identify and explain a wide range of behaviour, emotions and events". It is necessary, also, to add the concept of "identities" as referring to the broader, collective associations (around for instance ethnicity, class and gender) that serve in specific social contexts to mark similarity and difference and in which shared notions of the person are a key source of social action. Rutherford, in a recent book entitled Identity: community, culture, difference, argues that it is important in the analysis of identities to avoid essentialism and mono-culturalism , "asserting rather the unfixed and 'overdetermined' character of identities. The cultural politics of difference recognises both the independent and relational nature of identities, their elements of incommensurability and their political right of autonomoy" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 10). It is with this notion of identities that I want to associate the study of literacy practices.

The broader implications of national and international constructions of the person, self and identity have been addressed by a number of recent authors, struggling with the question, as Elliott puts it, of "where at the present time might the self figure in the current transitions from modernity to postmodernity" (Elliott, THES 10.7.92). Lash and Friedman, for instance, see the relationship between self and person as reciprocal: "... the human subject is actively situated in the context of various social, linguistic and discursive codes. In this view individuals are not merely 'lost' in cultural symbols. Rather, human subjects are shaped by - and yet re-shape - the multiplicity of meanings in social life". I am not sure yet whether this formulation is merely a vacuous relexicalising of the old debates about the individual and society or whether it provides new insights specific to the present condition of society. The question of how the creative dimension of the self can "re-shape" the given cultural forms into which it is socialised is certainly crucial to the analysis of literacy practices that I am putting forward, as I shall indicate below. Cascardi has attempted a response to the question of the sources of "creativity" and resistance, with respect to the concept of "desire": we should see desire, she argues, "as embedded yet transformative of social organisation. In this view, the desiring self is at once stabilised and disruptive, integrated and dispersed" ( ). There seems to be here a notion of the pre-discursive self, prior to language and acting independently on social institutions and established cultural forms, a notion that is present in much current literature. Benhabib, for instance, directly addresses this issue: "Instead of focussing on the cultural and normative content of selfhood, we need to examine the deep emotional and moral roots of how the human infant becomes a social self. Un like the postmodern decoding of the subject into linguistic units, or the discourse on socialisation in critical theory, she feels it is imperative to trace the developmental process through which the

vulnerable and dependent human infant becomes a creative, acting and gendered self". It seems to me difficult to trace this process without attending to specific discursive practices, such as the ways in which children are socialised into reading and writing, but this approach does force us to recognise the extent to which such learning is deeply implicated in the construction of self and person and not simply, as many educators and politicans would have us believe, simply a matter of acquisition of correct technical skills or competencies. Close detailed analysis of literacy practices in different social contexts can help us understand how we develop our notions of self person and identity in relation to social institutions and established cultural norms. It can also help us address the wider questions with which many of the above authors are concerned. Elliott, for instance, asks "how do the globalising tendencies of modernity transform self-identity and social relations". We need, he argues, "to examine how global transmutations of the personal sphere can generate forms of subjectivity that are liberating and/or repressive... These globalising processes are highly contradictory in their political implications" and require "a re-thinking of the nature of subjectivity". Again, micro-ethnographic accounts of the acquisition and use of literacy practices in different cultural contexts can provide a specific site for the study of these ideological contests of modernity and its transitions. The focus on the actual social practices of reading and writing avoids the problems of over generalisation associated with communication theory and of cultural narrowness associated with current educational agendas regarding literacy.

I would like to develop this analysis in two ways for purposes of the account of literacy. Firstly, the uses and meanings of literacy in different societies are similar to the uses and meanings of the concept of person, in that both represent what Kirkpartick calls "fields" in which dominant and other ideological structures are visible" (p. 12). Secondly, there is frequently a crucial relationship between the ideological fields of personhood and of literacy. What it is to be a person, to be moral and to be human in specific cultural contexts is frequently signified by the kind of literacy practices in which a person is engaged. This is highlighted by the ways in which, during International Literacy Year, Agencies including Unesco came to associate literacy with the idea of a fully human person, with enlightenment in contrast with the dark space of "illiteracy".The term "Literacy" in "International Literacy Year" (as in many Agency slogans) is code for "Illiteracy" with all that implies about personhood, civilisation, citizenship etc. This, I would like to suggest, is characteristic of the ways in which literacy and personhood are intertwined in many cultural discourses and serve to remind us that the acquisition of literacy involves more than simply technical skills. I will now summarise some recent work in the ethnography of literacy that specifically addresses some of the issues raised above concerning self person,and identity in contemporary society.

Niko Besnier provides a specific account of "Literacy practices and the notion of person" on the Pacific Atoll of Nukulalelae in which he conducted anthropological fieldwork. "The person on Nukulaelae", he says, "is perceived as a complex system of more or less autonomous 'uiga' meanings, which appear in different contexts and may be in conflict with each other. "Each aspect of the person is related in complex ways to particular emotional experiences, interactional dynamics and emotional roles. In Nukulaelae ethnopsychology, the notion of self as locus of psycological experience and that of person as social performer are interrelated" (1991, p. 19). The relevance of this to our present concerns is that in Nukulaelae "literacy itself is viewed as an important element in the very definition of person in that being able to read and write is presupposed in the characterisation of a socially competent person. Literacy is thus constitutively related to personhood". In this context there are two different literacies, that associated wit giving sermons and that associated with letter writing, and each involves different aspects of personhood and identity. Personal letters are associated with affect and locate the individual in a socioeconomic system of generosity, sociability and concern for younger kin (which generates admonitions and moral advice). "The person as represented in letters is a vulnerable entity at the mercy of emotional experience and the

circumstances of life. Sermons, on the other hand, bring out "authoritarianism and assertiveness and highlight assymetries in power, knowledge and morality between the writer-performer and the audience" (p. 20). Sermon givers harangue their audience, letter writers express empathy.

Different literacy practices, then, are associated with different notions of the person and of the self. Similar sets of associations can be seen in this culture, once the significance of literacy for these processes is recognised. Whether we attend a course or school, or become involved in a new institutional set of literacy practices, through work, political activism, personal relationships etc., we are doing more than simply decoding script, producing essays or writing a proper hand: we are taking on - or resisting - the identities associated with those practices. The idea that literacy practices are constitutive of identities provides us with a different - and I would argue more constructive - basis for understanding and comparing literacy practices in different cultures than the current emphasis on a simple literacy/illiteracy dichotomy, on educational needs as inevitably endemic to literacy and on the type of literacy associated with a small academic sub-culture, with its emphasis on the essay text and the typical identity associated with it.

I will now look briefly at one or two ethnographic examples that help clarify and elaborate the theoretical positions described above. One of the most striking examples is some work by Kathleen Rockhill with Hispanic women in California (Rockhill, 1987) These were migrant groups from Mexico, Spanish-speaking, in which men in the first generation went out to find jobs whilst women mainly managed the domestic sphere. The first response to her questions about literacy, and the role of literacy practices in their lives, were that the men were literate and the women were "illiterate". The Agencies working with them said this, as did the men and the women themselves. When Rockhill looked closer she found the men were mainly engaged in learning English in the oral domain in the workplace and were not that engaged in literacy practices. The women were engaged in domestic literacy as we might call it, a pattern replicated in many parts of the world -in which women are engaged in interfacing with the state - all those notes that come from school, all that literature that comes from social services - the women were managing that. But both they, the men and social workers marginalized both the literacy and the domestic practice, and so it didn't count as a form of literacy.

The next stage in Rockhill's account, notes how the women themselves wanted to get out of that particular sphere, and they saw literacy as a route out of it. They weren't just thinking about economic independence although that was crucial; they were thinking about notions of personhood. The identity associated with domestic literacy and the domestic sphere was one they wanted to reject. And one of Kathleen Rockhill's articles is entitled "Longing to be SOMEBODY," She argues that the model they have in mind - that they wanted to use literacy through literacy classes to achieve - was something like that of the women of the world secretary you see in the adverts - they often have a little air hostess bowtie and a sort of smart suit, and very often carrying a briefcase, usually a man's. There's a world there of a certain kind of somebody, a certain kind of person. One response to this might be "Oh God, they've bought the American dream." Rockhill says that would be a very patronising view to take. Working through what's happening in terms of people's identities associated with literacy practices we get a fuller and more sensitive view. In order to get to the literacy classes, these women are having to resist the pressure from men, and the men in fact exercise considerable violence to stop them getting out. The reason the men are exercising violence is because they see that shift of identity being associated directly with literacy. The very fact of trying to go to literacy classes is itself constitutive of changes of identity and of gendered power relations in the home. Literacy in itself, in the autonomous sense, is not reponsible for this shift, but rather the social relations it involves, the social practices or reading and writing are deeply ideological.

There is a further level of representation and perception of the literacy practices in which these women are engaged, which likewise indicates their ideological character.. The people teaching the literacy classes to which these women are coming have a different notion of where these women are going to finish up. Their model is that they'll finish up in small, clerical-type jobs, say at supermarkets, cashout desks and such-like. This is not the world of the globe-trotting secretary-- somebody - at all. So there's a conflict there as well. Meanwhile other teachers, at these adult education classes, more committed to writing process and consciousness-raising take a different view again, from either the students themselves, their husbands or the other teachers.. So Rockhill's argument is that we can't disocciate the moves to different literacies from the moves to different conceptions of the person and the different ideological positions of the actors involved and their social relationships.

Miriam Camitta has done ethnographic fieldwork into literacy practices- amongst adolescents in schools in Philadelphia. The insight there started from her position as a teacher with the fact that when the teachers asked the students to fill pages of writing they simply got blank pages; and yet the students were busy passing notes about under desk and outside of school. There was a lot of literacy going on, so she followed this up as a researcher, rather than as a teacher focussing on the discipline issue. As a researcher interested in literacy practices the students' activities could teach her a lot more about the role of literacy in contemporary urban contexts, than would a simple school-oriented view that they were breaking institutional rules. She found that a number of these teenage girls in particular were doing a whole mix of literacy practices. They were cutting out songs from magazines, and pictures; they were doing some autobiographical writing; some of them were writing rap songs which they would then read out to friends or show to friends that they'd edit there on the spot. And one of the points is precisely that this is a context in which the writing process is interactive, very recursive, very dialogic - a lot of feedback, in contrast with earlier views of writing, such as those cited above by Ong, that writing inevitably distances whilst oral language is dialogic. In this context the written medium is more dialogic whilst oral discourse often involved detachment and separation, as in "he said, she said" stories.

This written material was often stored in the attics where some of these people had their bedrooms, under the bed - suitcases full of all these pieces of writing of various kinds collected together. It was quite clear that identity was in some way there under the bed in that suitcase and its written texts - a totally different identity than the one they were confronted with in school. Again there are a number of implications to be drawn from this - one, clearly, that literacies and identities are closely associated. In this case Camitta further argues that vernacular literacy is in resistance to the dominant literacy of the school.

That links with another piece of research also in that area regarding the Amish in Pennsylvania. Again a teacher started the process moving; Andrea Fishman went to do some research amongst the Amish community, lived in a house with a family where there were some teenage girls and thought that a good place to start, as a good writing process teacher, would be to say to these girls, "Could you please keep a dialogue journal for me? and then I'll write back in it and we'll interact with each other around that?" After a few weeks, finding no response at all, she began to penetrate what might be the cultural explanations for this. She began to discover that the associations of that kind of writing are very specific culturally. And it's one of the critiques of the language experience and the writing process approach - that it is culturally specific in some of its assumptions about the kind of person that's being expressed when you're doing that kind of writing.

Fishman discovered that amongst the Amish there's what Dumont might call a more socially-centred notion of the person in which it is improper to assert and express the self over and

above other selves in the community. So writing there should be an expression of the community and its identity at that larger level. When Fishman looked at a newsletter that was being produced in the community, she likewise noted the ways in which there were very factual things in there very little editing went on, all kinds of mistakes entered which didn't seem to matter to anybody because all that mattered was getting across these particular factual moments about school trips to look at nature or whatever it might be. They weren't concerned with the notion of a self being expressed the writing process itself was merely a transparent way of achieving some further social end. So it was quite improper, in fact, culturally, to have asked these girls to keep a dialogue journal.

I'll just give one more example, from a rather different context, just to signal the kind of literature that anthropologists are developing around this area. Two researchers called Kulick and Stroud, working in New Guinea in a small village where again literacy had been brought by missionaries were asking the same sorts of questions around this kind of material - what happens when the communicative repertoire is altered or expanded by the introduction of new or different modes such as new literacy practices. And their starting point was we shouldn't be asking what is the impact of literacy; that already assumes a one-directional process. What they ask is how do people "take hold" of the new communicative practices? And in this context the answer is they absorb them into communicative practices already there in that particular social context. There was a set of conventions around public speaking in which it was improper to express "hed", ie. a kind of self and assertiveness. So you have to find all kinds of clever ways in political speeches of appearing not to be asking for something while at the same time doing it. Kulick and Stroud provide a detailed socio-linguistic analysis of that kind of discourse. What they noted was that that the tradiitonal, oral communicative repertoire became the conventional framework within which literacy was set. Literacy did not change things in the way that Ong and others claim it does. Rather, it got absorbed into the existing set of conventions. For instance Kulick has a letter which he received when he went away once for a brief time and was about to come back, which looked like a letter saying simply, "We miss you deeply and we look forward to your return." But when he read it closer and remembered the socio-linguistic conventions from the oral speech in that community he noted a bit about having a party, and he realized that what was actually going on was they were asking him to bring crates of beer for the party. But no-one could say so because that would be offensive to ask in that kind of way. The oral conventions had carried straight over into the written.

A great deal of current research in ethnography of literacy practices is beginning to explore these associations between cultural conventions, literacy practices, notions of self, person and identity and struggles over power . We need, then, not just "cultural" models of literacy but "ideological" ones, in the sense that in all of these cases, the uses and meanings of literacy entail struggles over particular identities up against other identities, often imposed ones.

Implications for Education and Pedagogy

All of this has huge implications for education and pedagogy: much of the conference at which this paper was delivered was concerned with exploring these implications and in relating the kinds of theoretical perspectives outlined above to practical considerations. I will conclude by suggesting some of the ways in which this might be explored.

It seems to follow from all of this that the teacher, the curriculum designer and the program developer, whether it post-industrialised societies facing "new times" or in Third-World "development" programs, need to have an understanding not only of educational theory, but of linguistic theory, of literacy theory and of social theory. That is putting one huge burden on all of us. I would argue though it is already being done implicitly anyway, that teaching

literacy already involves from the outset assumptions about cultural relations, identity etc. and that to maintain any kind of control of what we are doing, we need to make them explicit: to make it quite clear that in any context where literacy practices are being introduced or very often new literacy practices in a context where there already were literacy practices, then these kinds of analyses are going to be happening implicitly and the critical teachers will want to work through what are its implications for pedagogy, literacy teaching and for their social relations with their students.- I will briefly touch on a number of approaches to literacy, the Freirean approach, the language experience approach, and the genre approach.

With regard to schooled literacy, it is clear that in general the autonomous model of litercay has dominated curriculum and pedagogy. As Freebody and others have shown apparently innocent texts for infants and questions by teachers embed ways of maintaining discipline and of constructing socialised and generally uncritical persons. The importance of the school curriculum for wider political concerns has become more explicit recently in a number of countries, such as the UK, where a national curriculum has been developed and where public debates have raged regarding proper ways of learning to read and write. A visiting anthropologist would find it an interesting cultural problem to explain how it is that amidst economic decline and major world catastrophes, the British newspapers can run headlines and lead articles on which method of learning litercay is best, the phonics approach or the "real books". Succesive government Commissions (and more recently simply letters from ministers that take on the force of government Orders in Council without the incovenience of lengthy research and debate entailed by Public Enquiries) have become increasingly prescriptive regarding the language practices and curriculum to be "delivered" in schools. Recently, for instance, the head of the National Curriculum Council was reported in the press as arguing that children's pronunciation should be corrected in the classorom and even in the playground, whilst at the same time greater emphasis should be placed on ciorrect spelling and on a culturally specific literary cannon. The attention to such detail and the central importance of literacy acquisition, and writing dialect to national politics is less surprising in the light of the critical analysis we are developing here. A major concern of literacy transmission is training in Discipline: learning precise phonemic distinctions is not just a technical prerequisite of reading and writing but a key way of training new members of the polity how to learn and how to discern other distinctions, to make appropriate cultural discriminations in societies that are increasingly heterogeneous. These secondary discoures, as Gee calls the literacies delivered by state institutions, enable a centralising state to assert homogeneity against the heterogeneity evident in the variety of primary discourses into which communities socialise their members. Teaching awareness of these conflicts and of the ways in which literacy practices are a site of ideological contest, is itself already a challenge to the dominant autonomous model that disguises such processes.

This is what Paulo Freire's approach to learning in Third World literacy campaigns has attempted to do. Criticising the "banking" approach to learning, that assumed knowledge was a fixed set of facts to be deposited in the learner, he has advocated an approach that starts from consciousness raising, enabling the poor and oppressed to explore and analyse the sources of their oppression. Literacy classes would begin with discussion of key concepts in the local context, such as "favela" (slum) in shanty towns. The animator would discuss with class members what such concepts mean in their context, how it is that they come to live in such conditions, where the responsibility lies for the gross poverty experienced by so many. Once the words themselves had become familiar in this critical sense, the animator would then begin to write them on a board. In Portuguese, the language in which Freire began his work and also in Spanish, in which it has been particularly influential, words are built up out of syllable so that a word such as "favela" can be broken down into parts and then each part - fav ela - rebuilt with other syllables -fav + elo -to make new words. Students can quickly learn to copy the letters of such key words and then make their own new words, moving onto sentence building. This approach, a combination of general political socialisation with specific language tecahniques, has been highly influential in a number of Literacy Campaigns in the

past twenty years and is also being employed in many adult literacy classes in industrialised societies. From the perspective being developed here, however, there are a number of problems that need addressing. One critique by a South African educator, Mastin Prinsloo) brings out the problems he ahs found using Freire in that context:

"In Xhosa literacy classes, there is a somewhat problemmatic following of the basic Learn and Teach/Freieian methods of word building using syllable charts drawn from generative words (the ma-me-mi approach).

The problem with using this phonetic approach almost exlusively, is that lessons on word building tend to go on indefinitley without learners developing reading and writing habits that are embedded in real use contexts. The move to reading and writing seriously for meaning gets delayed for so long that learners sometinmes despair ... (there is an) urgent need for development of method to include aspects of language experience approach to literacy teaching together with the phonetical drills of the Freierian approach" (1990a, 14).

Similar criticisms can be found from other parts of the world (cf. Yates on Ghana). Bourgois, writing of the Nicaraguan Literacy crusade which was one of the more spectacular successes of a modified Freiereian approach, points out as an anthropologist how culturally specific the chosen key words can be and how difficult it is for programme organisers and teachers to really know what the key words in a culture are and what they mean. The Sandanistas organised their campaign after the revolution (cf. Lankshear) in the midst of revolutionary fervour that many commnetators have argued is the key ingreident for succes of the "mass" campaign (cf. Bhola). But they failed at first to recognise that those who lived on the Atlantic Coast belonged to quite different cultural and language groupings than the dominant Spanish speaking peoples who had been involved in the revolution. For them the key phrase "Sandino is the Hero of the Revolution" was as meaningless and as much part of Managuan hegemony as had been the grosser propoganda of the previous Samosa regime (Freeland). The Freireian approach is vulnerable to such culturally-blind manipulation by activists imbued with ideological fervour and believing so strongly that they are "empowering" "ignorant" peasants that they fail to see their own cultural and political domination. Rogers, reviewing a recent book on literacy and power in South American literacy campaigns (Archer and Costello, 1990) makes a similar point. Against the apparent belief of the authors and of many of the practitioners whose work they describe, that literacy is inevitably empowering, Rogers argues:

"Untill we know the nature of the power used by the oppressor, we cannot know whether literacy can or cannot do anything to relieve that oppresssion. By a close study of the nature and causes of poverty, it seems to be increasingly accepted that literacy can do little to relieve the first stages of extreme poverty (though it contributes mightily to the second and higher levels of increasing prosperity). Similarly, what we need now is to study power first, not literacy. If literacy in itself does possess the power to empower, as is so often claimed, then more is needed than the case studies in this book to demonstrate it. But I am beginning to doubt it; for the elites who hold power do not do so on the basis of literacy. They often use literacy to buttress their power; but they have many other weapons. If one hundred percent literacy was achieved in a country like Cuba, for example, would democracy be advanced one bit? I doubt it" (BALID Bulletin, spring 1991, p. 34)

A similar argument might be used to qualify some of the faith in teaching children the dominant literacies or the "genres of power" put forward by some advocates of the genre approach to schooling and literacy in Australia. Some here would argue that children cannot learn to question the power structures of the society they inhabit until after they have learned these genres. The teacher's task, then, is to impart knowledege of the traditional forms of reading and writing - the dominant literary forms, the genres of expository prose and essay-text writing, the ways of composing letters to business organisations - in order to empower their students. Only then can those students be in a position to question whether these forms

are biased against their particular backgrounds - in gender or ethnic terms for instance - and work to change them. There are a number of problems with this "wait for critique" approach. Gee (1990) points out that much of the linguistic triviaility that goes to make up such genres and to mark social groups as separate (phonology, spelling, surface grammar etc.) is learnt in "socially situated practices" (p. 149) not in the classroom: hence "they cannot be 'picked up' later, outside the full context of an early apprenticeship (at home and at school)". This is the problem with J.D. Hirsch's much-publicised notion of "cultural literacy", which is strikingly similar to that proposed by those on the other end of the political spectrum as the "genres of power": "he is right", says Gee, " that without having mastered an extensive list of trivialities people can be (and often are) excluded from 'goods' controlled by dominant groups in the society; he is wrong that this can be taught (in a classroom of all places!) apart from the socially situated practices that these groups have incorporated into their homes and daily lives" (Gee, 1990, p. 149).
A further problem with the 'wait for critique' approach is highlighted by Rogers' arguments above: this is that even when children have acquired the powerful genres there is no guarantee that they will become empowered: the goalposts may shift, as many women and those from ethnic minorities and working class backgrounds have discovered in the US and UK, where statistics show that women and people of colour who have university degrees cannot obtain the kinds of jobs achieved by white men with comparable qualifications. In Gee's terms, if the markers of separation are indeed often trivial, then it is not very difficult to change them as new cohorsts of 'outsiders' learn the spelling, grammar and phonology of the dominant groups.
A further problem with the dominant literacy position is how do we know what it is? As with other aspects of literacy, assumptions are being made about the nature and uses of reading and writing without actual ethnographic knowledge. There are in fact a number of powerful genres, not just a single autonomous literacy and we know very little about how they operate - in the Stock Exchange for instance, or in higher reaches of Commerce and Government. One might speculate that these in-house, abbreviated literacies through which those already confident of power communicate, are not the same as those laborious and explicit genres being taught in schools. After all, as many pupils know, the teachers who impart these genres have evidently themselves failed to achieve positions of power in their society. There is much research to be done yet on the actual relations between specific genres and the holding of power, financial and political. To lead students to believe that there is a one-way relationship between particular genres taught in school and those positions is to set them up for disappointment and disillusion.

There is a further argument, central to the ideological model of literacy (Street 1984) that learning literacy is not just about acquiring content but learning a process. Every literacy is learnt in a specific context in a particular way and the modes of learning, the social relationships of student to teacher are modes of socialisation and acculturation. The student is learning cultural models of identity and personhood, not just how to decode script or write a particular hand. If that is the case , then leaving the crirical process until after they have learnt many of the genres of literacy used in that society, is putting off, possibly for ever, the socialisation into critical perspective. When exactly will most students revise and criticise their school learning if not during the process of experiencing it? Griffin in describing stages or levels of literacy for purposes of developing assessment instruments, has argued: "empowerment may not occur until individuals proceed past the access and required levels to a level where they are able to set the parameters on what literacy skills are required" (Griffin, 1990, p.11).

This approach, in which liberal technicists line up with radical genere theorists, is I believe fundamentally flawed and deeply conservative. Apart from problems with the concepts of "stages" and "levels" that are coming to dominate discourses on literacy, there are problems in the theories of power, of literacy and of socialisation that underpin

these approaches. This is well articulated by Sue Newman : "Because stage-level models are generally based on middle class or mainstream definitions of standard or normative behaviour, they also ignore the political aspects of literacy development by failure to acknowledge that people are often denied comparable access to a particular literacy because of race, class or gender. Benefits of higher levels of literacy are cited without acknowledging that such benefits may not be identical for those who attain them, again because of differential status within a society". (Newman 1992, p. 13)

An approach that sees literacy as critical social practice would make explicit from the outset both the assumptions and the power relations on which these models of literacy are based. In contrast to the argument that learners are not "ready" for such critical interpretation until they reach higher stages or levels, I want to argue that teachers have a social obligation to do so. Much of the work of ACAL will, I believe, be concerned with examining ways in which this is possible on the assumption that skilled teachers can facilitate critical perspectives in appropriate language and communicative forms as readily as traditionalists can impart genres, levels, contents and skills within a conservative view of literacy. I hope that the account of literacy presented here, focussing on cross-cultural and theoretical isues, will make some contribution to this and to future discussions amongst adult educators in Australia. Referring back to the theme of the conference, this entails addressing not simply *The Rhetoric, The* Romance, *The* Reality of Literacy, but rather *Whose*Rehtoric, *Whose* Romance, *Whose* Reality.

Brian V. Street, autumn 1992

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